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CIA Head Would Use Press Spies

By Thomas Collins
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Washington—The gap between the CIA and the press widened yesterday when the CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, told newspaper editors that he saw nothing wrong with the practice of using American journalists on covert operations if unusual national security reasons warranted it. A correspondent might be "uniquely placed to serve his country in important circumstances," he said.

Speaking in response to questions at the American Society of Newspaper Editors convention, Turner said that he was puzzled by editors who oppose the practice. "I don't understand it, I really don't," he said. "You're saying that if you serve your country, you're no longer free. If you slant the news, that's bad, but at least you're free to do so. But reporting information to us somehow profanes your work. I'm sorry, I don't understand the connection you make." Turner said that the agency would resort to using journalists only in exceptional circumstances. He said he had changed the policy of former CIA Director George Bush, now a Republican presidential candidate, which had been not to use journalists, the clergy or academics in agency assignments. But Turner said that any such use would have to be approved by him. He had approved only three cases, he said, but none of the covert operations was carried out.

"I think a lot of correspondents are patriotic enough to do this," he said. He added that it would be up to the individual journalist whether to inform his news organization that he was working for the CIA on the side.

Some editors felt strongly that the policy casts doubts on the journalistic independence of American correspondents abroad and could result in their being accused as spies. A. M. Rosenthal, executive editor of The New York Times, who questioned Turner closely on the subject, called the CIA policy "shocking."

"It endangers the reputations and even the lives of foreign correspondents," Rosenthal said.

Eugene Patterson, editor of the St. Petersburg Times, said he was going to write an editorial explaining to the CIA why many in the press opposed the practice. Not all of the editors at the convention agreed, however. Randall Terry, president of the High Point (N.C.) Enterprise, said he supported the CIA policy. His managing editor, Joe E. Brown, was against it. "We're going to have write two editorials," Terry said. Jerry Ausband of the Myrtle Beach (S.C.) Sun News, said he thought "you could come down on either side of the issue and not feel guilty. It's not a black and white situation."